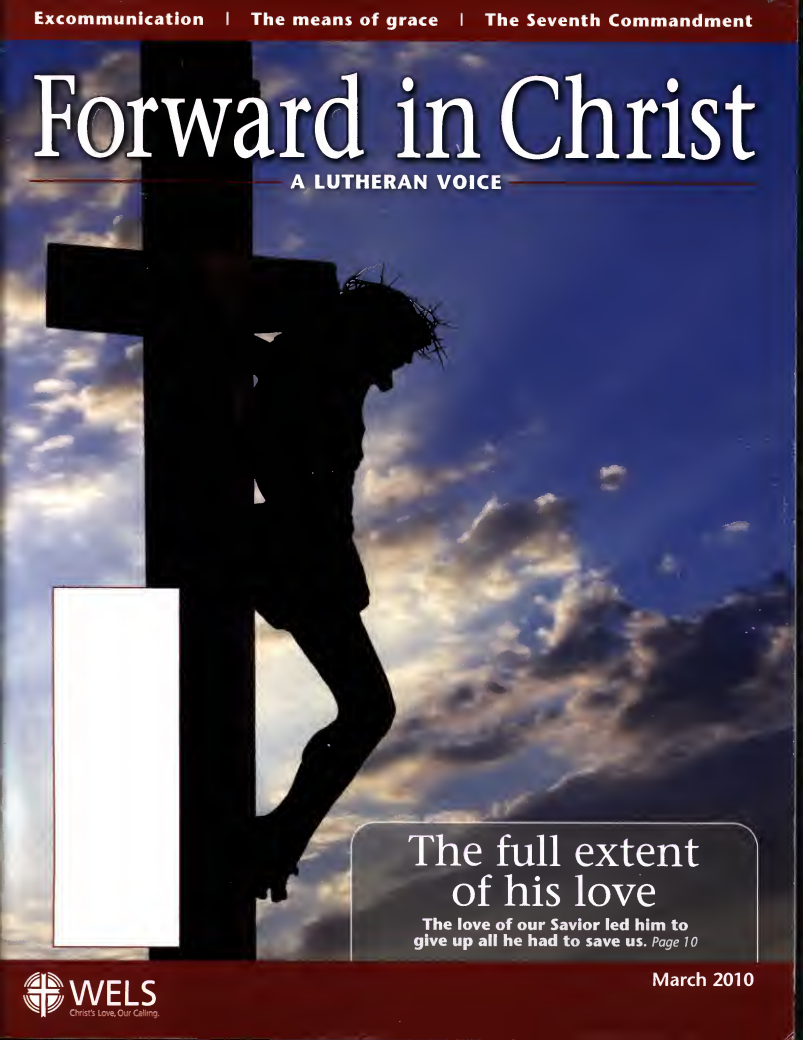



Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



The full extent
of his love

The love of our Savior led him to
give up all he had to save us. *Page 10*



“HE MUST... TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME”

— Mark 8:34

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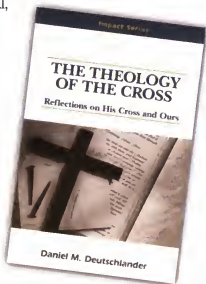
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FEATURES

- 10 | The full extent of his love**
Jesus loves us to the very end, all the way to the full payment that sets us free.
John A. Vieths

- 12 | God speaks: Prophecy from the exile to Jesus**
God designated messengers to contact his people during and after the exile.
John C. Jeske

- 14 | Confessions of faith**
An Apache Christian shares how he was brought out of darkness into God's light.
Joel Hochmuth

- 16 | Christ's love**
Jesus calls us to faith through the means of grace.
John M. Brenner

- 28 | The Seventh Commandment**
You shall not steal.
James A. Aderman

- 30 | Why me?**
God always has a plan, even when it includes pain and loss.
Mark Rolloff

- 36 | Lent is about cleaning**
Jesus washes away and wipes away every last sin.
Daniel R. Voigt

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May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us.—1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

Love is a word that is thrown around almost cavalierly. You probably heard it hundreds of times last month when the United States celebrated its national holiday, Valentine's Day. But what does love really mean? And how far will people really go today in the name of love?

Pastor John Vieths tells us about one man who went all the way to the grave to show his love for us and for all people. It's an account we hear every year in our churches—a love story that means so much more than the cards, flowers, and candy delivered on Feb. 14. It's the story of Jesus and his amazing life, suffering, and death. Relive that story—and remember his love—through our Lent feature article on p. 10.

That love—and the forgiveness of sins that Jesus paid for on the cross—is for all people. The journey of faith of Gary Lupe, an Apache Christian, reminds us of that fact (p. 14). Lupe's story also reminds us that we need to share that love with those around us, because the story is just too good to keep to ourselves.

Julie Wietzke



IN EVERY ISSUE

6

Feedback

Readers share their opinions

26

Bulletin board

Announcements from around the synod

7

Devotion

Just stay with me

27

Potluck

A variety of content and photos

8

From the president's desk

The proper focus of our worship

32

Editorial comment

Time to be on time?

9

Question & answer

Self-exclusion or excommunication?

33

Bible study

Heroes of faith

18

Campus cornerstone

Encouragement to be faithful

34

A thought

A big God

19

News

What's happening in WELS

35

Interactive Bible study

Portraits of a mature Christian



PASSING THE BATON

I wanted to respond to Pastor Snowden Sims' article on the future of our synod centered on young people and the "passing of the baton" [Jan.].

It is certainly of utmost importance to raise our children up in the Lord's Word, to nurture their faith, strengthen them when we can as often as we can. When ready, the baton must be passed. However there is a key point that I believe Pastor Sims misses with his article and could lead some congregations to let go too soon with possible long-term negative results. It takes time and experience to grow in the Word and the strengthening of our faith. It should be an active goal of all Christians. It takes work to be a good Christian and work to strengthen our faith. . . . Scripture tells us to grow in our faith, to grow in our knowledge of the Lord through the learning of his Word, and to put it into action.

We worry about the plight of our congregations, our synod, with regard to the loss of young people. It is not due to a failure to "pass a baton" but perhaps more of a failure to manage the spiritual health of the elders. Perhaps it is a bit of a cliché but it's usually true that our children reflect who we are and what we do, more than what we say. We need to ready our children to take the baton. I am referring to all the children of our congregations, as they are all our nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and children in Christ. Our worship and ministry activities must continually strengthen the faith of the elders and turn us back to the Lord reminding us that he and his Word should be the number one priority in all we do. If we do that, our children will follow and not drift away.

We must be careful not to pass leadership to those who are still teenagers in their faith.

Glenn M. Brunner
Kewaunee, Wisconsin

REST IN OUR SAVIOR

My heartfelt thanks to Pastor Peter Panitzke for his inspiring devotion, "Rest in the Savior" [Dec. 2009].

In the first paragraph, Panitzke listed several losses that could rob a soul of joy and hope at Christmastime—bringing darkness.

I was near despair from the depression he wrote about, even to the point of asking God to take my life. I opened first to *Forward in Christ*, and my eyes lit on Panitzke's article. It helped me to read his words: "to those who carry the burden of depression." I had always thought of this illness as my curse, and not a burden. This comforted me in a strange way.

Genie Sessums
Salem, Oregon

MOBILE CLINIC IN MALAWI

Thank you for sharing the interview with the Lutheran Mobile Clinic workers from the Central Africa Medical Mission [Jan.]. My family and I had the pleasure of spending time with Jennifer Lee in Malawi last summer. (Terri was in the United States during our visit.) These women are truly ambassadors for Christ in one of the most impoverished countries of the world. They face innumerable challenges and witness suffering on a daily basis, but they never lose sight of their mission. What a blessing they are to everyone they meet!

Rita Olson
Oak Creek, Wisconsin

GOOD'S PURPOSE

I found "Purpose clear in the new year" [Jan.] very helpful in putting me in perspective and helping me to realize what is most important. Many of Pastor Peter Panitzke's articles have been helpful in my journey through life. . . .

As I hold responsibilities in my home, work, and congregation as a husband, dad, cook supervisor (full-time), active

air guardsman (part-time), elder, and shepherd, I am not any busier than anyone else, but I let the things of this world preoccupy my time. I should follow what is said in the article: "But the Father's business is never just about getting some work done. It's always been all about saving lost and sinful people. Isn't that our business too? The people we work with are more important than the job. The people we volunteer with are more important than the task we are trying to do. The children we drive here and there are more important than the activities that fill our calendars." I am guilty and must confess that "I have often been about getting my business done rather than the Father's business."

Thank you, Pastor Panitzke and *Forward in Christ*, for what you continue to do! Another great tool in guiding us to reach our goal of heaven!

Mark Emond Sr.
Montello, Wisconsin

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The news article on Mandarin language study [Jan.] struck a chord with me. Now that many Asian countries are sending their students to the United States for our world-renowned private American education, they have uncovered the extra value in faith-based Lutheran schools like WELS. Whether by default or Master Design, this spiritual byproduct is an opportunity for host families to share their faith in non-dorm settings where students need housing. Our family is hosting students again this year from South Korea and China. Even through trials, God can bless such cultural evangelism efforts, incorporating each new family member under our own roof! We encourage families with room in their hearts and homes to prayerfully consider providing Christian family life experiences for students needing such a placement.

Vera-Ellen Cook
Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin

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Just stay with me

Then [Jesus] said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Matthew 26:38

Norman F. Burger Jr.

"Just stay with me." That's what the little child begs when she is sick in the middle of the night. That's what the frantic woman trapped in the wrecked car begs of the police officer who arrives at the scene of the accident. That's what the dying old man begs of his daughter who asks what she can do for him.

WE DON'T STAY WITH JESUS

"Just stay with me." That is what Jesus begged of his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Things were so bad for Jesus that he said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." This was a sorrow that you and I can't grasp. It was the sorrow of the collective guilt of all mankind draped around Jesus' soul.

A few years ago, a young man in my town partied with his buddies all night, only to wake up the next morning in jail and be told that he had stolen a pickup truck and killed a father of two when he rammed into him without his headlights on in the predawn darkness. Jesus was feeling that young man's guilt, your guilt, and the guilt of everyone who has ever lived or ever will live. The despair, shame, and fear of it all was bad enough that Jesus felt it would kill him. And in the end, at the cross, it did.

No wonder Jesus begged his disciples, "Just stay with me." The very human Jesus longed for the support of his disciples in his overwhelming sorrow. What Jesus asked was not that difficult. Just stay conscious. But they fell asleep. Just stay. But they ran away when he was arrested. Their failure to do these simple things for Jesus shows an astonishing lack of love.

How do we show an astonishing lack of love for Jesus? It is not in the big things we fail to do for him. It is in



the little things, the simple things: staying awake to finish a prayer to Jesus, paying attention during 20 minutes of a sermon where Jesus is talking to us, making a five-minute phone call to a friend having a rough time to show him Jesus' love, walking away from a temptation instead of giving in to it so Jesus can be glorified in us.

[Jesus] suffers it all for you, so that when you feel all alone, he will stay with you.

GOD STILL STAYS WITH US

Are you shocked and ashamed and worried that you love Jesus that little? Then take a second look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knows that his disciples will not show him the love he deserves and that you will not either. Yet the very shame

and guilt that should blanket your soul blankets his. The punishment that should come to you along with your guilt will be his to bear on the cross. And he suffers it all willingly for you, because that is how much he loves you. He suffers it all gladly for you to set you free from your guilt and shame and fear with his forgiveness.

He suffers it all for you, so that when you feel all alone, he will stay with you. Yes, when your troubles and temptations look impossible to overcome, when your suffering seems unbearable, when you worry that God may not want anything to do with you, and when you face death, you can beg him, "Just stay with me." And he will.

Contributing editor Norman Burger is pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, Lansing, Michigan.



Mark Schweden

When the focus of worship is on what God does for us, then our worship will be a blessing.

The proper focus of our worship

Worship is a special time. In God's house, God's people step away from the distractions and difficulties of daily life and gather as a spiritual family in the promised presence of God himself. Why do we come? What is the primary focus of our worship? On what we do? Or on what God does for us?

Certainly there are things that we do in our worship. We join with brothers and sisters in the faith and call upon God to be with us. We humbly and sincerely admit how far we have fallen and how miserably we have failed our God. There, in worship, we join our voices in hymns of prayer, praise, and proclamation. Every week we express what we believe in creeds that have been spoken by Christians for centuries. There, we pray.

But if we think of worship as primarily something we do, we are missing the most important part of our worship. Worship is about what God does for us.

Lutheran worship—biblical worship—is above all God speaking to us in his Word. It is God proclaiming through human messengers the crushing blows of his law. In worship, God lovingly speaks to sin-burdened sinners the sweet good news of sins forgiven and death defeated. In readings and sermons, God instructs, strengthens, equips, and motivates his people for lives of Christian service. Worship is where God comes to us in his sacraments, adopting sinners into his family through Holy Baptism and strengthening the faith of his people by giving them his true body and blood in the Lord's Supper. In worship, with every syllable of his Word that is proclaimed and spoken, God assures us of what he has done for us; in turn, he also reminds us of the mission that he has now entrusted to us.

When the focus of worship is on what God does for us, then our worship will be a blessing. It will help us to understand ourselves and all of our weaknesses. It will direct us to the grace and love of God. It will transport us to the foot of the cross, where Jesus demonstrated a love both undeserved and inconceivable. It will fill us with joy that continues long after the time for worship ends.

Sad to say, many lose sight of this primary focus and think of worship as primarily an activity that they do. When that happens, people tend to develop certain unhealthy expectations of worship. They begin to view worship as something that should be "fun" or entertaining. They adopt a consumer approach to worship, expecting that worship should be shaped by their own tastes and that it should cater to their own comfort level. They insist that worship should reflect what they want, what they like, and what they find pleasing. They run the risk of losing sight of what God wants to do for them in that precious time in his house.

King David said, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD'" (Psalm 122:1). David could say that because he knew and remembered the true focus of God-pleasing worship. God-pleasing worship always focuses on the proclamation of Christ and on all that God has done for sinners like us. And if that is what characterizes our worship, if that is where our focus is, then our worship will never be dull, never boring, and certainly never irrelevant. When God's Word is proclaimed, worship becomes the blessing that God wants it to be.

Is self-exclusion from church membership the same as excommunication?

Forrest L. Bivens

When asking your question you added the comment that you always understood excommunication to be a biblical practice but consider self-exclusion to be more of a “slap on the wrist.” Christian discipline is so vital to the well-being of any church, so I hope this answer is helpful.

EXCOMMUNICATION: ACT OF LOVE

The command to deal with manifest sinners (see Matthew 18:15-20) keeps the practice of church discipline firmly on the Christian's agenda. The desire to retrieve and forgive the sinner is at the heart of it all. The parables that precede and follow the instructions in Matthew 18—the lost sheep and the unforgiving servant—emphasize this truth.

So it is wrong to ignore godly discipline or make it a low priority that seldom gets done. It's not right to assume or hope someone else will do this and save us the effort. It remains our duty to identify and expose sin among fellow believers and to seek godly contrition and joyful reliance on Christ. We are to approach them with humble love and the desire to serve and win them back to God.

But what if after our admonition, no repentance results? In love we excommunicate, declaring the impenitent sinner outside the community of believers. Unrepentant people show themselves to be out of fellowship with the saints on earth and in heaven, so we declare them outside—excommunicated—in the hope that it moves them to repent.

SELF-EXCLUSION: ACT OF FRUSTRATION

As normally used in our circles, self-exclusion is *not* the same as excommunication. It is a way of terminating congregational membership but usually not declaring someone impenitent or outside the Christian faith. Congregations use the term when they feel they cannot complete the “steps” of discipline outlined in Matthew 18 (using witnesses, telling the church, publicly declaring impenitence). So congregations announce that those they are trying to admonish have excluded themselves from the church. First John 2:19 is sometimes cited, and formal discipline efforts usually end.

In practice, self-exclusion usually says excommunication is not procedurally possible or advisable in this situation, and frustrated congregational leaders settle for a termination of church membership.



SELF-EXCLUSION: TIME TO TESTIFY

Is this right? Is this loving? These questions are frequently asked. Every congregation needs to take a closer look at what it is doing and why. The essential thing is that a congregation thoroughly exhausts its efforts to reclaim the impenitent. Your view that self-exclusion is a “slap on the wrist” is incorrect since no Christian discipline activity is to be seen as a punishment, mild or otherwise. But your suspicion that declaring self-exclusion may be taking a shortcut and failing to serve the best interests of sinners may be in place.

Generally speaking, refusal to be admonished is itself a demonstration of impenitence. This allows the church to communicate to the offender how impenitence closes the door of heaven. As an act of love this should be clearly communicated to the offending member even if standard excommunication protocol cannot be followed fully. Many terminations of church membership should include the stern warning that exclusion from the Christian church on earth also means exclusion from the joys of heaven.

Maybe the term *self-exclusion* has outlived its usefulness among us. Our desire to speak the truth in love remains the important thing. We owe it to the sinner to give the kind of admonition Jesus wants the erring to hear, always in the hope of winning him or her back.

Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.



The full extent of **HIS LOVE**

Jesus loves us to the very end, all the way to the full payment that sets us free.

John A. Vieths

Take a moment to consider our observance of Lent—our Wednesday services and Holy Week celebration—from the outside. What are we looking at during Lent? Why are we watching? Are we like the rubbernecks who slow down to gawk at an accident? Are we like the people who attend car races in the hope of seeing a horrific crash? Are we like the crowds who were drawn to see executions in the days when criminals were still publicly hanged? Are we simply satisfying a morbid sense of curiosity when we watch Jesus suffer?

No, we are taking in the love of our Savior—love that led him to give up all he had to save us. No one could have written a more eloquent introduction to this part of salvation's story than John writes in these words from his gospel: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love" (John 13:1). Why are we watching? Because here Jesus shows us the full extent of his love.

JESUS LOVED

It's not as though Jesus had never done anything to show us he loved us before this. Even John writes, "Having loved his own who were in the world" His entire earthly journey from conception to death was an unbroken stream of love flowing to everyone whose life he touched. And the love he displayed was remarkable.

Take his love for his family. How often don't our families suffer tension and strains when

one member tries to insert himself or herself into another member's business. Parents don't know when to let their adult children live their own lives. Siblings, always competing to be the leader of their generation, can't stop telling each other what to do. And how do we react when our own life is the one in which they are meddling? Do we "pop off" with something nasty to say? Do we give them six months of the silent treatment? Do relationships become less than warm and loving?

At the wedding at Cana, Mary goes to Jesus for a little miraculous intervention when the wine runs out (John 2:1-11). She inserts herself into his messianic business. That is no small place to be meddling! Though Jesus mildly rebukes her for involving him and ignoring his own timing, his love for her is undimmed. He goes ahead and solves the problem with 120 gallons of the finest wine anyone there had ever tasted. That same deep regard and unwavering love for her will remain constant all the way to his last hours on the cross, when he gives her the apostle John to care for her after he is gone.

His love for the sick and the outcast shows itself in more than miracles. He not only heals a leper but also touches him (Luke 5:12-16)! The crowds tell blind Bartimaeus to keep his mouth shut. Jesus interrupts his all-important trip to Jerusalem to give him his sight (Mark 10:46-52). Jesus was not disgusted when a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years touched him. After she had been healed, he paused to praise her faith and speak a word of peace (Luke 8:43-48). The miracles of mercy are love in themselves. But on top of this, Jesus shows these people a dignity often missing in our treatment of people who are not physically perfect in every way.

"Having loved his own who were in the world," Jesus already loved them. He already loves us. But he wanted them—and us—to have something more.

THE FULL EXTENT OF HIS LOVE

He wanted them to have something more than an example of love to follow—a picture of what love looks like when we are called on to deal with the flawed people around us. He wanted them to have something more than "warm fuzzies"—"chicken soup for the soul" stories that rekindle our faith in human kindness and hold out the hope that someone might care about us as well. Godly examples and warm feelings may make us feel spiritual, but they leave us just as lost as we are without them.

The full extent of [Jesus'] love stretches all the way to his saving death.

Now Jesus wanted to show them, and us, the full extent of his love—love that is more than we could have imagined. "Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love."

Are you struck by the understated, almost euphemistic, way John describes Jesus' understanding of what he was about to suffer? "Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father." It sounds so calm and sterile. But his return to the Father led him through a horrific and bloody battle.

This reveals a greater love than we could have imagined, because Jesus knew it would cost him his life. If someone is drowning, you must not swim directly out to the struggling swimmer. In his panic the drowning person may pull you under with him. It could cost you your life. Jesus had every intent of letting us pull him

under with us. He fully knew that what was killing us was going to kill him as well. If he was going to save others, he could not save himself. The full extent of his love stretches all the way to his saving death.

That death was not easy. There was no quick and painless bullet to the brain. There was no blow from behind resulting in instantaneous lights out, leaving no time to dread his impending doom. The torture and abuse went on hour after hour through the night and into the morning.

His love for you and me kept him there through it all. Every suffering moment—from the rough treatment on the way to the high priest; to the first punch in the Jewish court; to the 18th lash of the scourge tearing away his skin, the 19th, the 20th; to the pounding of the spike through his left foot; 42 minutes into the crucifixion, 160 minutes into the crucifixion, five and a half hours into the crucifixion—every suffering moment he had the power to stop. Can you imagine choosing to stay when no matter how you shift your weight or adjust your posture, there is simply no relief from the cramps that wrack your body, no way to draw a fully satisfying breath, minute after minute, hour after hour? Can you imagine choosing to stay when the panic at God's judgment washes over you and all hope is denied you and the full weight of humanity's sin is crushing your soul? But Jesus loves us to the very end, all the way to the full payment that sets us free. Jesus shows us the full extent of his love.

During these weeks of Lent, Jesus still comes to our pulpits and altars in Word and sacrament because he loves you. Come to see him, and you will know the full extent of his love.

John Vieths is pastor at Calvary, Dallas, Texas.

GOD SPEAKS:

Prophecy from the exile to Jesus

John C. Jeske

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1,2).

When an ancient nation was defeated and deported to a foreign land, that usually marked the end of that nation's history. The exiles either died in slavery, or they lost their national identity. After the northern ten tribes of Israel were led off into the Assyrian captivity, they were never heard from again. We still refer to them as the "lost ten tribes." If God had not intervened, that would also have been the fate of the exiles from Judah who were deported to Babylon.

But because of God's promise to Abraham, God could not abandon Abraham's descendants.

EZEKIEL AND DANIEL

During all 70 years of their exile, God designated chosen messengers to maintain contact with his people in Babylon. God spoke to them through two men: Ezekiel and Daniel. Ezekiel was a priest who lived among the exiles; Daniel was a statesman who lived at the royal court.

We usually associate Ezekiel with visions. When God called Ezekiel to be a prophet, he gave him a vision of the glory of the LORD, that awesome appearance of the covenant God in cloud and flame and smoke. The most unusual vision God granted Ezekiel is the one that occupies chapters 40 to 48 of his book. It's an elaborate vision picturing the restored temple of God, the redeemed community.

Daniel had been deported to Babylon as a young man, possibly a teenager, and remained there for 70 years. His basic

message was: "Israel's God is superior to the idols of heathen nations." Daniel's prophecy reassured a people crushed by defeat and deportation: "God is still in control. He will carry out his gracious plan despite opposition from hostile world powers."

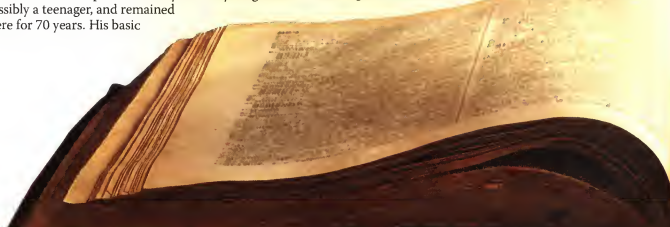
The preaching of Ezekiel and Daniel sustained the faith of the believing exiles. Then the exile came to a sudden end in 539 B.C., when Medo-Persian King Cyrus toppled Babylon and announced to the exiles: "You're free to return home!"

HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI

Several years later the first contingent of exiles (fewer than 43,000) reached Jerusalem. The returned exiles' top priority was rebuilding the temple, which lay in ruins. In less than a year they had laid the foundation, but then trouble started. Their Samaritan neighbors opposed them, and other enemies threatened physical harm if the Jews didn't stop building. As a result, the building project came to a standstill for 16 years. By that time the Jews had gotten used to worshipping in the ruins of what had been their temple. Besides that, times were hard, and they had convinced themselves: "The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built" (Haggai 1:2).

Then the prophet Haggai came on the scene. He rebuked the people sharply for setting wrong priorities and reminded them of God's love for his chosen people. Four years later the temple was dedicated.

A prophet who worked with Haggai was Zechariah. He also urged the discouraged builders to look past outward appearances and instead to recognize and



rejoice in the spiritual and future glory of God's people. Like Ezekiel, Zechariah received much of his message in visions—eight of them. His prophecy closes with two great prophecies about God's messianic King.

The disappointing spiritual conditions among the returned exiles prompted God to send them another prophet—Malachi. Where there is faithlessness, there is selfishness, self-righteousness, and arrogance. These were problems Malachi had to deal with. He rebuked the people, calling them to repent. His prophecy comes to a close as he predicts the coming of the Messiah and of his forerunner.

Malachi was the last Old Testament prophet. During the four hundred years after Malachi, God sent no prophet to his people. The written prophecies of the Old Testament were complete; God no longer communicated directly with his people. Recall that in a parable of Jesus when the rich man wanted God to send a special messenger to his five brothers, he was told: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them" (Luke 16:29).

A LOOK BACK

Before we follow the march of prophecy to its fulfillment, let's pause to take one final look at its illustrious roster. What was so special about those men? What were their most impressive traits?

The first was their unblinking loyalty to God. Like us, they knew the temptation to be self-centered. But as we observe and listen to them, we see intelligent men who, in spite of human frailty, brought to God the sacrifice of their reason. In so doing they reached their fullest potential and were of the greatest usefulness to God.

After their loyalty to God, the outstanding characteristic of the Old Testament prophets was their loyalty to his Word of law and gospel. The prophets knew that the only message that can convict a person of his sin is the message of God's absolute unwillingness to compromise with evil. They preached the message of God's law with a heavy heart, but they preached it explicitly.

The prophets also were careful to offer the only solution to the problem of sin. The gospel preached by the prophets was unconditional, and it was explicit. Through his prophets, God made it clear that he awards membership in his family as well as a place at his side forever, not on the basis of merit but out of pure grace. God announced that he would accept a substitute for his people, the "Servant of the Lord." That substitute would render perfect obedience to the Father (doing what sinners had not done) and would intercept the fiery lightning bolts of God's judgment (undoing what sinners had done).

THE DAWN OF FULFILLMENT

God promised through Malachi: "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come" (Malachi 3:1). The Lord Jesus pointed to John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. Jesus said: "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11).

John was great because God used him to introduce the incarnate Son of God to the world. John's prophetic message is summarized in the words: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! . . . I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:29,34).

Here the march of prophecy reaches its climax. In Jesus Christ, God said all that he had to say to a sinful human race, all that he could say, all that there was to say. From the first book of the New Testament to the last, the truth is emphasized that Jesus is God's uttered truth for sinful mankind. Apart from Jesus Christ, God's sacred secrets cannot be known. That is Christ's claim. He claims to speak authoritatively for God.

Professor Emeritus John Jeske is a member at St. Luke, Watertown, Wisconsin.

This is the third article in a five-part series on prophecy. Next month: Prophecy in the New Testament



CONFESSIONS of FAITH



**An Apache Christian shares
how he was brought out
of darkness into God's
wonderful light.**

Joel Hochmuth

Gary Lupe is the first to acknowledge that his faith in Jesus Christ is nothing short of a miracle. But he tells the story of his journey to faith in such a matter-of-fact way that it's easy to overlook the remarkable transformation the Holy Spirit has worked in his life.

DARK BEGINNINGS

Lupe is a child of the reservation. A Native American, he's lived his whole life on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona, where he grew up well acquainted with traditional Apache beliefs. He was first exposed to Christ as a teenager through teachers at East Fork Lutheran High School. But whatever faith he had quickly gave way to the temptations and hardships faced by so many of his peers.

Shortly after high school, he got his girlfriend pregnant and they started a family. "We didn't really know right from wrong about living," says Lupe. "We just figured all the Apaches were doing this, and that's the pattern that we followed."

A logging foreman, Lupe was one of the fortunate few on the reservation with a steady job and income. That presented its own temptations. "During that time I fell into alcohol; I became a heavy drinker," Lupe admits. "I was drinking every day. It wasn't hard for me to get a can of beer, a 6-pack, or a 12-pack because that's what I needed."

Even in a desperately poor place like the reservation, he learned money doesn't bring happiness. "I was in a hole—a real deep hole that I couldn't get myself out of," says Lupe. "I was in misery."

But as dark and hopeless as his situation was, Lupe had not yet hit bottom. Not even close. When he and his girlfriend were having their third child together—a daughter who died one month after her premature birth—he gave up alcohol only to

replace it with marijuana, cocaine, and "glass."

For the next ten years, he battled the new addiction—but he lost more frequently than he won. Even the births of two more children weren't enough incentive to stay sober permanently. He was a father in title only. "The drugs took control of my life," Lupe recalls. "I spent more money on drugs than I did on my kids."

At one point he stayed off drugs long enough to commit to marrying his girlfriend and the mother of his children. But his roller-coaster ride was headed for a free fall. He endured three straight days of sleeplessness brought on by his renewed drug addiction. Delirious with fatigue, Lupe says he began hearing voices in his head, voices telling him to kill his wife. Was it Satan? Lupe won't say other than, "It was something evil—I felt it." He admits he was ready to follow the will of the voices. Terrified, he grabbed hold of his wife until the feeling passed.

"That's where my spiritual journey began," he says. "I had been in such terrible places in my life, both spiritually and physically. I was tired of who I was. I don't even remember who I was at the time."

SPIRITUALLY TRANSFORMED

Lupe says he dumped the drugs for good and began the search for something more meaningful. He knew that the religion of the Apaches wasn't the answer. He describes it as a faith of fear and retribution—when you suffer some particular evil, you call in a medicine man who then removes it by placing a curse on someone else.

He visited many of the dozens of other nominally Christian churches on the reservation but left each one feeling empty. "I saw there was a God and I wanted to know who that God is," Lupe says. "But none of the churches were giving me that."

His mother was the one who encouraged him to go back to the Lutherans, the ones who operated the high school he had attended as a teenager. There, he once again made contact with WELS missionaries. He even enrolled in the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS), a school that equips Apaches for various roles within congregations in the mission field.

It was through those classes at ACTS that the Holy Spirit began Gary's spiritual transformation. "This God in the Bible told me who he is in his Word," Lupe says. "It wasn't the professors' ideas. They weren't telling me their ideas about who God is. They were telling me who God is from God's Word and that was the Bible."

For the first time, the message that he had a Savior from sin and that Jesus was the ultimate answer to evil in the world was actually sinking in. Suddenly, everything the medicine men were practicing became irrelevant. "To have a Savior means that when Jesus died on the cross, when he rose the third day from the dead, he defeated the devil," says Lupe. "All the curses and all the witchcraft and all the deities and all the whatever that the Apache people believe have the power—Jesus defeated those powers."

SHARING THE MESSAGE OF LOVE

That is a message that Lupe now is taking across the reservation as a trained evangelist. He's preaching and teaching in the Apache language within the nine congregations and preaching stations in the WELS Apache mission field. "I want people to see what Jesus has for even us Apaches—drug addicts, alcoholics, traditional religion believers—the love that Jesus has for us," he says.

His message isn't always well received. In fact, Lupe says among the Apache people it is often misinterpreted, especially the concept of love. "Love is misinterpreted as you shouldn't tell anybody that they're wrong when they're doing something wrong," he says. "You shouldn't tell somebody about their sins if they're committing sins, if you love them."



Gary Lupe

Because of his own past experiences, Lupe is uniquely qualified to preach law and gospel to both believers and unbelievers alike on the reservation. "They can't really argue against me about the issues they have—like, for instance, drug abuse. I've been there. I know what it's like to be a drug addict," he says. "They cannot throw me their excuses if they fall back into drugs."

But the other side of the coin is that for those on the reservation who have fallen into the trap of drugs and alcohol and confess their sins—who better to share the message of forgiveness than someone who has walked the same road? "Jesus is my Savior. He saved me—a simple human being that does not know any better," says Lupe. "He took me out of that darkness that I was in and showed me what his light had for me."

While his story is a miracle of faith, Lupe has come to expect miracles. Maybe that's why he's so matter-of-fact about his spiritual transformation and why he spends so little time pondering where he'd be without Jesus in his life. "I don't think about that," he says. "I don't think about those days. I just thank God every day that he blessed my life for me to be able to hear his Word, to understand who he is. I'm thankful for that every day."

Joel Hochmuth is the WELS director of communications.

To learn more about Gary Lupe and the ACTS program, watch the March WELS Connection after March 1 at www.wels.net/welsconnection.

Christ's Love

John M. Brenner

Jesus calls us to faith through the means of grace.

God in his love and mercy has reconciled the whole world to himself through the perfect life and innocent death of his Son. He has declared the whole world forgiven for Jesus' sake.

Yet in his wisdom the Lord has decreed that only those who trust in Jesus as their Savior will receive the benefits of his redemptive work. Our Savior tells us, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. . . . Whomever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:16,18).

How then can a person come to faith? Since human beings are by nature dead in their transgressions and sins, they cannot come to faith on their own. The Holy Spirit must create new life within them. Paul writes, "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4,5). The Holy Spirit makes a person spiritually alive, that is, he works faith and confidence in him. As the Bible tells us, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS THROUGH THE GOSPEL

How does the Holy Spirit create saving faith? He does not work it directly. That is, he does not work without a means (immediately) to bring people to faith. He works through means (mediately), the means of grace.

In his Great Commission, our Savior tells his church, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19,20).

God's kingdom is extended through his Word and sacraments. That is God's perfect plan. As St. Paul writes, "God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14).

We learned to confess that truth as children in catechism class. "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (Luther's Explanation to the Third Article).

THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS THROUGH THE GOSPEL PROMISES IN THE SACRAMENTS

Through Baptism the Holy Spirit brings forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. When the Jews on Pentecost were struck to the heart by Peter's sermon and implor-

ingly asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children" (Acts 2:37-39).

Ananias told Paul in Damascus, "Get up and be baptized and wash your sins away" (Acts 22:16). That same Paul by inspiration wrote, "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."

God so loved the world that he

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:4,5).

Because the Holy Spirit works regeneration (the bestowal of new life or faith) and conveys the forgiveness of sins through Baptism, it is proper to say that Baptism saves. As Peter declares, "Baptism . . . now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism saves not because it is a good work that we do for God but because it is a way the Holy Spirit works or strengthens the faith in our hearts through which we are saved.

Our Savior has also attached his promises to the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. When Jesus instituted Holy Communion, he said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance

of me. . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:19,20). He gives his followers his very body and blood, which procured salvation for us. In his Supper he assures each communicant: This body was given and this blood was shed for you; you are forgiven. Jesus calls his Supper the new covenant in his blood. The new covenant is the forgiveness of sins (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). The Holy Spirit uses the promises contained in this sacrament to strengthen faith.

NO ONE IS SAVED APART FROM THE GOSPEL

The Holy Spirit works to create and sustain faith through the means of grace, and according to God's revealed will, no one will come to faith apart from the gospel. The Bible makes that very clear. Paul writes, " 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' . . . Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:13-15,17). Each of Paul's questions expects and demands the answer, "They can't." No one can come to faith apart from the proclamation of the gospel.

No one can come to faith,
and no one can remain
in faith apart from the
means of grace.

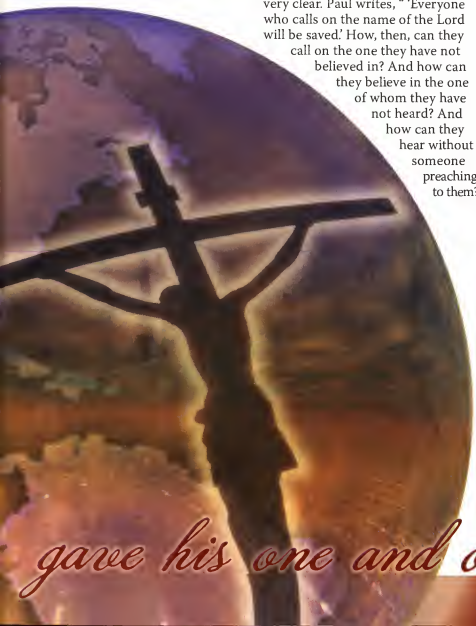
That is why it is so essential to tell our children, our friends, and our relatives about our Savior. That is why the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are so central to the life of our congregations. That is why we will want to search the Scriptures regularly, partake of the Lord's Supper, and remind ourselves and our children of the blessings of Baptism.

That is also why it is so vitally important to support the work of our synod in sending missionaries throughout our country and around the world. No one can come to faith, and no one can remain in faith apart from the means of grace.

God gives us the privilege and the duty to bring his message of salvation to our fellow sinners through Word and sacrament. And we can be confident that whenever we do so, the Holy Spirit will be working to accomplish God's purpose in his plan of salvation.

John Brenner, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville, Wisconsin.

This is the third article in a six-part series on Christ's love.



gave his one and only Son

Encouragement to be faithful

The college experience is an exhilarating one. Challenges and opportunities come, but so do temptations and doubts.

Abby Rose

College is an incredible blessing. It provides exciting opportunities to meet new friends, to pave the way for one's future, to utilize the broad spectrum of God-given gifts, and to be challenged both personally and academically. The challenges are exhilarating, and the rewards are fulfilling. God has blessed us with an American collegiate system admired internationally and attainable for many. American campuses are buzzing with students of all ages, goals, and personalities; qualified professors excited to motivate; and an atmosphere like none other.

With its unique atmosphere comes a unique ministry.

A campus ministry's main focus is to counter the devil's schemes set up specifically to attack college blessings. Our culture has at times portrayed and even accepted the college life as that of the prodigal. One may enter college ready to embrace all that college brings even if it goes against his or her faith. The devil can also use loneliness and insecurities to get people to trade in faith for acceptance. The degrees and standards of college can also create false humility or even real egos. The earthly intellectual challenges can also become a foothold for doubt or an opportunity to abandon Jesus.

Just like anything of the devil or of the world, limitations become obvious and the consequences quite painful. We find that our degrees may not get us that job that can pay for our fantasy lifestyles or that the human resource department can't solve the problems deep within our hearts. But what we also find is that Jesus is always there to pick us up, despite the way we've neglected and ignored him. The absolute love and humility of Jesus—who could have talked in five-syllable words or had the most expensive palace in the world—becomes so much more evident and beautiful once you've lived and been stung by the false promises of college life.

Campus ministry has the privilege to provide the means to show Jesus' faithfulness despite our worldly and material unfaithfulness. Campus ministry provides the encouragement that we all need daily from other brothers and sisters on the same leg of the race as we are. Campus ministry gently teaches us that home is where Jesus is and that our family is much more extended than we could ever imagine.

I am not sure where I would be without campus ministry. I am thankful that God hasn't pulled an *It's a wonderful life* move on me. Experiencing the moments where you can show God your faith through his power is the core of the Christian walk. Most of those moments that

God gives, I seem to fail on the first couple tries—sometimes on the fifth to a hundredth try. Good thing his grace allows me to have days filled with thousands and thousands of moments to show him how much I desire my heart to be fully his. My college life seemed to be a whirlwind of life moments where my heart couldn't have cared less if God was pleased. Those dark and painful experiences prepared me for future life experiences to show God and others how much I truly love and believe in him. The time without him—so I thought or hoped even—made the time when I realized how incredibly present he is all the more magnificent, his grace all the more sweet.

May God continue to equip those in campus ministry with the love of his Son Jesus to face the opportunities presented on campus as well as to prepare them for the next step of the race.

Abby Rose, student outreach coordinator at The Point of Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at Trinity, Dundee, Wisconsin.



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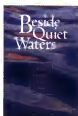
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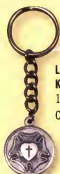
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Obituaries

Lila M. Damman 1931–2009

Lila Damman (née Hrudka) was born May 24, 1931, in Wallace, Mich. She died Dec. 2, 2009, in Manitowoc, Wis.

She taught for 28 years at Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Roland; two brothers; one sister; and one grandson. She is survived by three sons and six grandchildren.

Ervin Reinhold Walz 1921–2009

Ervin Walz was born Dec. 30, 1921, in Java, S.D. He died Dec. 21, 2009, in Minneapolis, Minn.

A 1943 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Cedar Mills Township, Minn.; Darlington, Ann Arbor, Mich.; St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.; Zion, Sanborn, Minn.; St. John, Fairfax, Minn.; Martin Luther Academy, New Ulm, Minn.; and Martin Luther Preparatory School, Prairie du Chien, Wis.

He is preceded in death by his wife, Elvern. He is survived by 2 sons, 1 daughter, 10 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren.

Ruby A. Ladwig 1927–2009

Rudy Ladwig (née Clatanoff) was born Dec. 8, 1927, in Wisner, Neb. She died Dec. 9, 2009.

She taught at Trinity, Janesville, Wis.; St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.; Jordan, West Allis, Wis.; Centennial, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Gethsemane, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Daniel. She is survived by two daughters; eight grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; and one sister.

Susanne Kay Carter 1950–2009

Susanne Carter (née Arndt) was born Jan. 15, 1950, in Plainwell, Mich. She died Dec. 14, 2009.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she

taught at Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis.; St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.; and St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Grey; one stepson; two stepdaughters; seven step-grandchildren; and two brothers.

Bruce John Pingel 1945–2009

Bruce Pingel was born Sept. 23, 1945, in Bay City, Mich. He died Dec. 14, 2009, in Greenfield, Wis.

He taught at St. John, Caledonia, Minn., and St. John, Burlington, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Charlene; one son; two daughters; seven grandchildren; two brothers; and three sisters.

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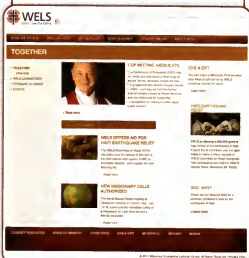
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Through my Bible in 3 years



April 2010

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Matthew 22:1-14 | 11. Matt. 26:57-75 | 21. Jer. 31:27-40 |
| 2. Matt. 22:15-46 | 12. Matt. 27:1-14 | 22. Jer. 32, 33 |
| 3. Matt. 23:1-22 | 13. Matt. 27:15-31 | 23. Jer. 34 |
| 4. Matt. 23:23-39 | 14. Matt. 27:32-50 | 24. Jer. 35 |
| 5. Matt. 24:1-31 | 15. Matt. 27:51-66 | 25. Jer. 36 |
| 6. Matt. 24:32-25:13 | 16. Matt. 28:1-20 | 26. Jer. 37, 38 |
| 7. Matt. 25:14-46 | 17. Jeremiah 26 | 27. Jer. 39-41 |
| 8. Matt. 26:1-16 | 18. Jer. 27, 28 | 28. Jer. 42, 43 |
| 9. Matt. 26:17-29 | 19. Jer. 29 | 29. Jer. 44, 45 |
| 10. Matt. 26:30-56 | 20. Jer. 30:1-31:26 | 30. Jer. 46, 47 |



www.wels.net/subscriptions

MLS grad becomes new school president

Aaron Frey, the new president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich., tweets. He also has more than four hundred friends on his Facebook account and his own blog. If you don't know what this means, that's okay. The important thing is that Frey's students do know.

Although Frey may not be able to text as quickly as his students, he does embrace technology and all the advantages it offers him in sharing the gospel. He'll surely put his technological skills to work in his new call to MLS.

Frey, a 1989 graduate of MLS, was not always convinced that he wanted to be a pastor. Yet it was Paul Prange—the most recent MLS president, then serving as a tutor at MLS—who knew what he needed to hear.

"Aaron," Prange said, "do you really want to spend the rest of your life waiting for someone else to tell you how the original languages of Scripture actually read?"

"He totally had my number!" notes Frey. "I so badly wanted to see it for myself and tell the world!"

Now Frey will be able to mentor other students as they determine whether God is calling them to full-time service in the ministry. "I love teaching teenagers," he says. "Their brains are reformulating. They're becoming more independent in their thinking. Whereas they used to take



Aaron Frey was installed as president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary on Feb. 21 in the seminary chapel.

a lot of things that they had been told in their younger years for granted, now they want to dig deeper and understand why the things that one person believes are true while the things that another person believes are not. I love to introduce that curiosity to the beautiful treasures of Scripture, to God's fathomless truths."

Frey continues, "The president of a school is, however, largely an administrator. To be more focused on administration than I was in the parish is going to take some reinvention on my part. But I like reinvention!"

As Frey begins this new call, he will rely on the faculty and staff at MLS to show him the way. He plans on listening and learning from them before making any plans for change. One important job that he sees before him, though, is letting more WELS members know that their Congregation Mission Offerings are being used well to train future teachers, pastors, and missionaries.

"Our ministerial education system is a jewel," says Frey, "and it's not because we have showered it with enough money to build marble palaces. It's because the Lord has blessed our humble offerings in an extraordinary way, and through that blessing he has provided us with thousands and thousands of called workers who are confident in the truths that he has revealed to us in his Word."

New focus for the Commission on Adult Discipleship

The Commission on Adult Discipleship, as part of the newly formed Congregational and Ministry Support Group, is changing the way it serves congregations. Whereas under the former Parish Services one of its main roles was to produce congregational resources, now the commission is focusing on training congregational leaders, especially for leading adult Bible study.

"Adult Bible study defines us, and everything flows from the Word in a congregation," says Pastor Randy Hunter, chairman of the Commission on Adult Discipleship. "So our top priority is to train pastors and laypeople to be better adult Bible study leaders."

To fulfill its new focus, Hunter says the commission—composed of elected and appointed pastors volunteering their time—will be working closely with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Northwestern Publishing House, and Wisconsin Lutheran College to form Bible study training events for pastors and lay leaders. The goal is to offer workshops by 2011—first for just pastors and then for both pastors and lay leaders.

The commission has been without an administrator since December 2009. Its counterpart, the Commission on Youth Discipleship, has been without an administrator since August 2009. Since funding is available to fill only one of these positions, the two commissions recommended to the Conference of Presidents that it call a director for Youth Discipleship and leave the position in Adult Discipleship vacant for the time being.

"We felt that we could pursue our focus short term without a director better than Youth Discipleship can

MORE ABOUT AARON FREY

- Before accepting the call to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Frey was serving Emanuel, Tawas City, Mich.
- Frey also served at Peace, Otsego, Mich.; and Mount Olive, St. Paul, Minn.
- Frey's family includes his wife, Michelle, and their five children—Jacob, 13; Megan, 12; Kyra, 10; Lexie, 4; and Carissa, 2.



pursue its ministry without a director," says Hunter.

Hunter says the commission will continue to work on other ongoing projects as time and funding allow. This includes working with the Ministry of Christian Giving on stewardship materials, overseeing women's ministry, and developing resources for marriage and small group ministry. "It's going to be difficult for us," he says. "We'll do what we can, but it's not business as usual.

The Conference of Presidents called a director for Youth Discipleship in February. It also called a permanent director of Lutheran Schools, a position that is being held in the interim by Greg Schmill.* Besides the director for Adult Discipleship, a new position of coordinator of Early Childhood Education for Lutheran Schools will remain unfilled until funding becomes available.

WELS President Mark Schroeder says that the areas in the Congregational and Ministry Support Group will continue to work together to reach their goal of equipping congregational leaders. "Their main task will be to train the trainers," he says, "and they'll work closely with each other and with the Conference of Presidents and circuit pastors to help congregations in whatever area they need."

*Names could not be reported because the calls were not issued at the time of this writing.

Mission presentations inspire congregations

Spreading the gospel around the world is a job in which all WELS members can participate. Whether it's done personally or supported by prayers and offerings, mission work is our work.

Through presentations conducted by home and world missionaries, congregations can hear more about the mission work that is being done on their behalf around the world. WELS Missions Promotions coordinates presentations in which missionaries visit congregations, schools, and other groups to share the blessings and challenges of telling others about Jesus.

"When people become more aware of what is going on in the world mission field and in their missions, their prayers become more specific," says Pieter Reid, friendly counselor to Indonesia. "[People] also become more supportive—with their prayers and their offerings and with telling others."

Pieter Reid and his wife, Marlys, recently conducted a 16-day speaking tour in Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas, to inform 19 congregations and groups about the gospel ministry taking place in the Lutheran Church in Indonesia. "We talk about the difficulties and persecutions the Indonesian Christians face, and then against that backdrop, we talk about how the Lord is blessing the work taking place there," says Pieter. "We end with an encouragement for each person to be a missionary wherever God has placed them."

Cross of Christ, Universal City, Texas, was one of the places at which the Reids presented. David Schneider, pastor at Cross of Christ, says hearing a live presentation from a missionary is a "sermon that is not preached, but lived."

He continues, "When you have people on the ground who have experienced the challenges that come with mission work and who express how God uses them in those scenarios, it's a powerful encouragement."

One of his members agrees. "[It was] the most inspiring presentation I've



Pieter and Marlys Reid presenting at Cross of Christ, Universal City, Texas. The Reids recently conducted a 16-day mission presentation tour to Texas.



Pieter and Marlys Reid

ever attended to motivate my own missionary work on our evangelism committee."

Pieter says that presentations like these not only inspire members here but also encourage members of the mission fields. He says, "To be able to go back to the national pastors in Indonesia and assure them so many people are praying for them—that means more than you can say."

To schedule a missionary presentation for your congregation or group or to find out about other WELS missions promotional materials, contact the Missions office at jmo@wels.net; 414-256-3234.

Meet the editorial staff—uncut

Ever ask yourself, "Who are these people who write for Forward in Christ magazine?" Through this series you can find out. Read on:

Norman Burger, pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, Lansing, Mich., is one of *Forward in Christ's* newest devotion writers. Learn more about him through his answers to these questions.

Q How would you describe yourself?

A I am fun-loving and like joking around. I have been married for 18 years to Betsy, a dental hygienist and instructor at Lansing Community College. I have two sons, Ben (12 years) and Mark (10 years). I enjoy sports and have coached my sons' soccer teams over the years. I love dogs. We lost our beloved Barkley this summer, but the neighbor's dog visits daily, sometimes twice a day, so I get my dog fix and she gets a biscuit; it works out well for both of us. I also like gardening and yard work.

Q What areas of the pastoral ministry do you especially enjoy?

A I especially enjoy working with youth and the teaching aspects of the ministry.

Q Do you participate in any district or synod committees?

A I am a member of our district youth discipleship committee.

Q Describe your writing style.

A Simple and folksy.

Q How will you choose the devotion texts that you write on for FLC?

A I will probably choose texts that have personal meaning to me. I know that if a text brings comfort, peace, hope, or joy to me, that it will bring those same blessings to other believers.

Q What is your favorite Bible passage? Why?

A Psalm 68:19: "Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens." This passage reminds me that God is my Savior. He will take care of me—every single day. I don't have to carry life's burdens myself. And because I don't, I can be happy and positive, living a life of praise to him instead of complaining or despairing.

Q Anything else you want readers to know about you?

A I have served the congregation I am at for the past 23 years and have truly enjoyed being a pastor. I am humbled to have been given the privilege to proclaim the gospel the past two decades and more.



Pastor Norman Burger and his family.

Agencies join to provide emotional care

WELS Committee on Relief (COR) and Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service (WLCFS) are now working together to offer immediate spiritual and emotional help to WELS members affected by a disaster.

Although the Committee on Relief's first purpose is to provide for the immediate physical needs of a congregation and its members following a disaster, Mark Vance, COR director of operations, says that Christian counseling also is often needed. Unfortunately it's not always available in the community where the disaster occurred.

By using WLCFS counselors, the Committee on Relief can now provide immediate Christian counseling, oftentimes from a distance. All that is needed is a computer, Web cam, and an Internet connection. "[COR representatives] can basically take us with them to any scene that they go to," says Dan Nommensen, coordinator of WLCFS Member Assistance Program, which uses distant and on-site counseling and consultation to help WELS congregations strengthen their members.

While face-to-face counseling is important—and will be used when necessary—bringing Christian counselors onto the scene is costly and creates legal issues due to out-of-state licensing concerns. "We want to help our WELS members through a crisis situation, and using this approach, I think, we have a better reach and a better opportunity to do that," says Nommensen.

The Committee on Relief will fund initial counseling for congregations after a disaster strikes. It also supplied a grant for the counselors to be certified in crisis response.

"We're excited to be doing relief work in conjunction with other synod entities," says Vance. "We really can work together to make sure God's people are receiving God's Word and God's comfort and compassion."

To learn more about the Member Assistance Program, contact Dan Nommensen at 1-800-438-1772, dnommensen@wlcfs.org. Learn about WELS Committee on Relief and read accounts of work done in disaster areas at <http://blogs.wels.net/relief>.

God's Word at work in Mexico

Many newlyweds head to Mexico for their honeymoon, but not many stay a year to carry out mission work. Brad and Heidi Krause, though, are doing just that.

Brad, a 2007 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, served two years as a tutor at Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.,

islator of World Missions, explains, "The Board for World Missions gave its blessing to their efforts to share the gospel with the understanding that there were no guarantees that we would pick up the work by providing manpower should a congregation be gathered. On the other hand, should the Lord bless this effort beyond expecta-

Particularly memorable is the Krauses' interaction with Matteo, a poor Mexican-Mayan man living in a little shack along the ocean. The Krauses developed a relationship with Matteo and one day shared a devotion based on 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven. . . . We live by faith, not by sight."

"After I read this section of Scripture to him, Heidi and I saw the power of God's Word on his heart," says Brad. "He began to cry. As tears were coming down his face, he said, 'I have nothing. I have nothing here, but I have trust in Jesus. I have trust in God. This part of God's Word went to my heart.'"

Brad continues, "Sometimes when you're doing ministry you can reach a point when it seem as if nothing is happening—maybe not as many people are coming to church on Sunday as you would like, or someone just doesn't seem interested. Seeing this, however, was just a visual reminder of what God says so clearly, 'My word will not return to me empty.'"

Portions of this article were taken from the mission blog www.lutheransinmexico.com, written by Rachel Hartman, wife of Missionary Mike Hartman.



Brad Krause (left) and Matteo. Brad and his wife, Heidi, have been sharing God's Word with Matteo during their time as volunteer lay missionaries in Mahahual, Mexico.

and was poised to receive a permanent assignment into the ministry in spring 2009. He and Heidi were married in June.

Heidi's father, Jerry Zimpelmann, owns a house in Mahahual, Mexico. He asked Brad and Heidi if they might consider leading a Bible study with a group of people that had begun gathering there.

"I talked to many different people in the synod to see if it would be okay for me to postpone being assigned and come down here and serve as a lay member," says Brad. "After much consultation and prayer, we decided to come down here for one year."

The Krauses' volunteering of their time and service is independent of WELS World Missions. Dan Koelpin, admin-

istrator of World Missions, explains, "The Board for World Missions gave its blessing to their efforts to share the gospel with the understanding that there were no guarantees that we would pick up the work by providing manpower should a congregation be gathered. On the other hand, should the Lord will do."

For now, the Krauses are holding a Bible study on Sunday mornings at a local restaurant. "We have had anywhere from 5 to 13 people come," notes Brad. "We also look for opportunities to go to people's houses and have Bible information classes and Bible studies with them. We canvassed an area about an hour north of Mahahual and met some people up there. God has also provided us with several opportunities, the latest of which has been a small group of fishermen who want us to stop by in the future to have Bible studies with them as well."

DID YOU KNOW

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mexico serves 11 congregations and 17 preaching stations throughout the country and operates its own seminary. The church body has about 650 baptized members. Seven Mexican pastors, five Mexican seminary students, and three WELS missionaries oversee the work. English language classes are held in Gomez Palacio, Mexico, as part of an evangelism effort. The work that Brad and Heidi Krause are conducting in Mahahual is in addition to these efforts.

School stays open despite sprinkler woes

Quick thinking, dedicated members, and generous gifts helped an Alaskan school stay open and continue to offer a Christian education to its community.

One week before Grace Lutheran School in Kenai, Alaska, was scheduled to open for the 2009–10 school year, the State Fire Marshall closed the school because it didn't have a sprinkler system that September 2007 legislation required for all educational buildings. Grace had built an addition in July 2007 that complied with the old regulations but did not receive the paperwork to prove this until the new regulation went into effect. The school was allowed to stay open for the 2007–08 and 2008–09 school years, but when Grace asked for another year—so city water could be used with the sprinkler system making the installation much cheaper—that appeal was never considered.

With only one week to find an alternate location, the leadership at Grace secured two different unused schools but learned those locations wouldn't work because those buildings also did not have sprinkler systems.

This left two options: either close the school until a sprinkler system could be installed or convert the principal's and pastor's garages into classrooms.

"We hesitated to close the school because once a school closes it usually never reopens, and God had not shut every window of opportunity yet," says Thomas Schmidt, pastor at Grace.

School parents unanimously voted to move the school into the garages, which didn't need sprinkler systems because they were considered private property. In two days the congregation had converted each garage into painted, carpeted, well lit classrooms, and school was able to start.

In February, the students moved back in their original building, now equipped with a new sprinkler system. But how did the 130-member congregation come up with the \$137,000 needed for the system? A \$100,000 gift from a WELS couple, a \$14,500 grant from WELS Committee on Relief, donations from other WELS schools, and generous giving by Grace's members has put the congregation within reach of paying off the entire system.

"We prayed, sweated, and looked at Scripture to keep us humble and trusting," says Schmidt. "If you keep working, searching his Word for wisdom, and praying, the Lord in time will shut all the doors except the one he wants to take you through."



The elementary school students at Grace, Kenai, Alaska, attended school in the pastor's and principal's remodeled garages this fall. Eighty percent of Grace Lutheran School's students are nonmembers.

Defining religion



Theology: the knowledge of God and his divine teachings revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Theologian: one who studies the Scriptures and has the God-given ability to understand, to expound, and to teach God's truth to others, and to defend against false teaching.

In the news

The Jan. 6 edition of the *Houston County News*, La Crescent, Minn., featured the arrival of **Pastor Chris Christianson** to La Crescent to serve as pastor at First Evangelical Lutheran Church. The article explains how he became a pastor and also lays out some of his plans for his ministry in La Crescent. He said in the article: "First and foremost, I want to be proclaiming God's Word in all its truth and purity so the members of this congregation can be nurtured. That'll be my first priority."

The Jan. 7 edition of the *Times-Call* in Longmont, Colo., featured **Our Savior's Lutheran School** and its recent accreditation by WELS School Accreditation. The article mentions the school's "faith-heavy curriculum" and how accreditation is a step toward expansion. "It's a way to validate ourselves and establish a place in the community," principal Dane Mattes said in the article.

District news

MINNESOTA

The **Wind Symphony of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**, performed at WELS grade schools, high schools, and churches in Wisconsin from Feb. 4 to 8.

SOUTH CENTRAL

Beautiful Savior, College Station, Tex., hosted a Christmas Eve dinner for international college students. The congregation has organized this popular outreach event for more than 20 years.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The children of **Amazing Grace, Milwaukie, Ore.**, lead each year's Christmas Eve service with songs and

recitations. Mary, Joseph, Gabriel, and the innkeeper are joined by shepherds and angels. Thirty-five students participated in this year's event. Nineteen are members of Amazing Grace. The others attend the outreach events for children and the preschool.

WESTERN WISCONSIN

The **La Crosse Area Lutheran Schools Principal's Conference** pooled its resources to run a 30-second television commercial in late January and early February. The commercial highlighted the area Lutheran grade schools as well as Luther High School in Onalaska, Wis. Those who saw the commercial were invited to visit www.lalschools.org.

Marie Ashley has played the organ for worship services for 80 years. She has been an organist at St. John, Doylestown, Wis., and St. Stephen, Fall River, Wis.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN



St. John, Marquette, Wis., held an appreciation dinner for **Helene Prochnow** on Dec. 6, 2009. Prochnow has played the organ for St. John for 66 years.

The district reporters for this month are: MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Joel Lillo; PNW—David Birsching; SC—William Gabb; WW—Brett Brauer.

WELS news briefs

BOARD FOR WORLD MISSIONS

414-256-3233; dan.koelpin@wels.net

The World Mission Board meeting in January **authorized the immediate calling of a missionary for Latin America and a friendly counselor for India.** The missionary to Latin America will be a shared call with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and funded through the existing authorized budget and special funds. The new man is being called in anticipation of retirements within the Latin American Traveling Theological Educators team.

The friendly counselor to India will be the fourth WELS friendly counselor serving in that country. This call is funded through the existing authorized budget and special funds. It is being issued in advance of the anticipated retirement of a WELS friendly counselor in India within the next two to four years. The World Mission Board probably will not call another friendly counselor after that retirement.

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

414-256-3201; mark.schroeder@wels.net

In its January meeting, the Conference of Presidents (COP) appointed a task force to determine the form and function of Congregational Planning and Assessment, the entity that will succeed Parish Assistance, a program ending in June, which offered individual consulting services to congregations. The task force—composed of the first vice president, a mission counselor, a seminary professor, and several parish pastors—will bring its recommendations to the

Conference of Presidents in April. The COP is prepared to call a director for this ministry, if necessary, in April.

COMMISSION ON YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP

The Commission on Youth Discipleship is postponing the next **International Youth Rally**—originally scheduled for the summer of 2011—until the summer of 2012. The commission is urging youth groups to work on service projects during the summer of 2011. The main reason for the postponement is the vacancy in the office of Youth Discipleship director.

WELS COMMITTEE ON RELIEF

414-416-6396; mark.vance@wels.net

The WELS Committee on Relief (COR) **released \$50,000 to the international relief agency CARE for immediate disaster relief supplies for Haiti** following an earthquake in January. Vance reports that additional donations to COR will support any potential efforts undertaken by WELS contacts in the region and continue to support CARE efforts as appropriate. WELS has no resident missionaries or congregations in Haiti but does have congregations in the neighboring Dominican Republic. No members from those churches were hurt in the 7.0 magnitude quake, although some members have relatives in Haiti that were affected. Learn more about WELS relief efforts in Haiti at www.wels.net/haiti.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Kipmiller, David A., to Shepherd of the Lakes, Fenton, Mich.

Putz, David M., to Faith, Saint Petersburg, Fla.

Schmidt, Jason L., to St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, Calif.

Welch, Clayton G., to Faith, River Falls, Wis.

Wilcox, Patrick J., to Good Shepherd's, West Allis, Wis.

Teachers

Beyersdorf, Shana T., to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.

Fager, Matthew W., to Trinity, Neenah, Wis.

Hulse, Erin M., to Salem Preschool, Woodbury, Minn.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary assignment

Hagen, Kurt W., to Zion, Morgan, Minn.

ANNIVERSARIES

Menomonee Falls/Germantown, Wis.—Bethlehem (50). Mar. 7. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. Beth Rippel, 262-251-3120.

Fountain City, Wis.—St. Michael (150). Apr. 11. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; potluck to follow. June 13. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. Oct. 3. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal to follow. RSVP requested. Elroy Conradt, elroy.conradt@gmail.com.

Milwaukee, Wis.—St. Peter (150). Apr. 25. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow at Serb Hall. RSVP requested. Elaine Metoxin, 414-764-8847.

Cortland (formerly Firth), Neb.—St. John (125). Sept. 12. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. 402-989-4775.

Mandan, N.D.—Redeemer (75). Sept. 26. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; noon meal presentation to follow. Anniversary worship, 2 P.M. David Hein, 701-663-5344; redeemermandan@hotmail.com.

COMING EVENTS

Martin Luther College choir tour—507-354-8221

- Mar. 1, 7 P.M., Beautiful Savior, Clarks-ville, Tenn.
- Mar. 2, 7 P.M., Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga.
- Mar. 3, 7 P.M., Faith, Tallahassee, Fla.
- Mar. 4, 7 P.M., Abiding Love, Cape Coral, Fla.
- Mar. 5, 7 P.M., Hope, West Palm Beach, Fla.
- Mar. 6, 7 P.M., King of Kings, Maitland, Fla.

- Mar. 7, 7 P.M., Risen Savior, Pooler, Ga.
- Mar. 8, 7 P.M., Living Word, Gray, Tenn.
- Mar. 9, 7 P.M., Trinity, Jenera, Ohio
- Mar. 10, 7 P.M., Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, Ill.
- Mar. 21, 3 P.M., Chapel of the Christ, New Ulm, Minn.

Pathways to Christ (ladies) retreat—Mar. 12-14. La Sure's Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. 920-233-1069. Web site, www.martinluther.oshkosh.com.

Sacred concert—Mar. 14, 2 P.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. 920-261-4352.

Prep Singers of Luther Preparatory School spring concert tour—920-261-4352

- Mar. 17, 4:00 and 6:30 P.M., First Ger-man, Manitowoc, Wis.
- Mar. 18, 6:30 P.M., Trinity, Brillion, Wis.
- Mar. 19, 7 P.M., Trinity, Marshfield, Wis.
- Mar. 20, 7 P.M., St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.
- Mar. 21, 10 A.M., St. John, Minneapolis, Minn.; 7 P.M., St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.

Christian Woman Today retreat—Mar. 19-21. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen, 262-784-0412.

Wisconsin Lutheran High School annual auction and dinner—Mar. 26, 5 P.M. Country Springs Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Yvonne Quint, 414-453-4567, ext. 2012. Web site, www.wlhs.org.

WELS National Choral Festival—Apr. 9-11. Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz. Includes 21 WELS high schools from around the nation. Apr. 9, 7 P.M., pops concert. Apr. 11, 7 P.M., sacred concert. Jon Pasbrig, 602-268-8686, ext. 32; pasbrig@alacoyotes.org.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus Easter tour—262-242-8100

- Mar. 24, 7 P.M., Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.
- Mar. 31, 7:30 P.M., St. Paul, Moline, Ill.
- Apr. 1, 7 P.M., Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan.
- Apr. 2, 7 P.M., Calvary, Dallas, Tex.
- Apr. 3, 7 P.M., Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Tex.
- Apr. 4, 10:45 A.M., Holy Word, Austin, Tex.; 4 P.M., Cross of Christ, Universal City, Tex.
- Apr. 5, 7 P.M., Victory of the Lamb, Katy, Tex.
- Apr. 6, 7 P.M., Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.
- Apr. 7, 7 P.M., Grace, Scroggins, Tex.
- Apr. 8, 7 P.M., Holy Cross, Oklahoma City, Okla.
- Apr. 9, 7 P.M., Grace, Lowell, Ark.
- Apr. 10, 7:30 P.M., St. Mark, Normal, Ill.
- Apr. 11, 10:30 A.M., Peace, Loves Park, Ill.; 3:30 P.M., Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis.

Chapel of the Christ dedication weekend—Apr. 10-11. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 877-652-1995; mlcinfo@mlc-wels.edu. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu.

Christ Empowered Operations men's workshops—Theme: "Fearless faith"
• Apr. 17, St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis. Brian Arthur Lampe, 414-915-3211; Brianandtracey@tds.net.
• May 22, St. John, Frontenac, Minn. Pastor Christopher Hoppe, 651-345-2757.

Note: In the Milwaukee area, there are also monthly "Grill Kings" barbecues. Brian Lampe, Brianandtracey@tds.net.
Gala V "Prep Around the World"—Apr. 17, 5 P.M. Presentation featuring countries that Luther Preparatory School students have come from and go to serve. 920-262-8104; events@ps.wels.net. Web site, www.lps.wels.net.

WELS regional handbell festivals—Apr. 17-18. Each festival concludes with a festival concert on Apr. 18, 2 P.M. Web site, www.welsbells.com.

- Northeast region, Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.
- Southeast region, Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich.
- Western region, St. John, Lewiston, Minn.

WELS Conference of Staff Ministers—Apr. 23-24. St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis. Marilyn Miller, 281-444-5894; MarilynMiller@aol.com.

WELS Church Librarian's Organization spring conference—Apr. 24. St. Paul, Brownsville, Wis. Speaker, Sarah Malchow. Theme: "Multi-cultural outreach & resources." Registration deadline, Apr. 14. Carol, 920-922-6650; cleonard40@gmail.com.

47th annual LWMS convention—June 24-27. Millenium Hotel, St. Louis, Mo. Hosted by the Missouri Valley and Mid-America Circuits. Theme: "Show Me Your Ways, O Lord." Web site, www.lwms.org.
Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) national convention—July 13-15. Holiday Inn, Manitowoc, Wis. Dale Markgraf, dalem@newulmtel.net.

Operation Science summer teacher training—July 28-29. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. For Wisconsin area Lutheran K to 8 teachers and schools. beththweed@operationscience.org. Web site, www.operationscience.org.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

Picture this



Seventeen students and chaperones from Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich., traveled with three other public school groups from Texas, Nevada, and Alaska to Italy and Greece in June 2009. The group from Huron Valley Lutheran High School is pictured in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City.

Much of the tour was spent seeing sites from the early history of Christianity. Pastor Jim Hoff of St. Paul, Livonia, Mich., who went along as a chaperone, is pictured sitting on Mars Hill in Athens, on the lower side of the Acropolis. "It was quite a moment as he read from Acts 17, on the very hill where the apostle Paul himself preached and converted many to Christianity . . . we were very moved!" says Dena Miller, another of the chaperones.

Says Miller, "All had a wonderful time and were able to not only experience ancient history but witness their faith as well." Several Huron Valley students befriended a student from Alaska who was just baptized. "[They] answered many of his questions, along with inviting him to Pastor Hoff's devotions," Miller says. "Since much of our travels were to sites significant in early Christian history, he was always interested to hear Pastor Hoff's comments about their relationship to biblical events."

Submitted by Dena Miller



Send pictures to **Picture this**, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@wels.net. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

How well do you know where Paul and Silas traveled on Paul's second missionary journey? Unscramble the letters to discover some of the major cities where Paul stopped. If you need a hint, look up the Bible references. Read the entire account of Paul's second missionary journey in Acts 15:1–18:23.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. HATICON (Acts 15:1) | 6. AEERB (Acts 17:10) |
| 2. YARTLS (Acts 16:1) | 7. STAERN (Acts 17:15) |
| 3. SOART (Acts 16:8) | 8. RIHNCOT (Acts 18:1) |
| 4. PPIIHPH (Acts 16:12) | 9. PEEHSSU (Acts 18:19) |
| 5. TALHEASOCSIN (Acts 17:1) | 10. AARESECA (Acts 18:22) |

ANSWERS: 1. Antioch, 2. Lystra, 3. Trosas, 4. Philippi, 5. Thessalonica, 6. Berea, 7. Athens, 8. Corinth, 9. Ephesus, 10. Caesarea

Even in an age of e-mail, God's law still guides us. Follow this imaginary conversation between a granddaughter and grandfather that shows us how God's law applies to all generations.

Dear Grandpa,

My conscience is bothering me—and I'm not sure if I should let it. A while back I found an iPod in a snowbank near school. You know about iPods, right? They're the size of a credit card and hold hours of music and videos. Anyway, it still worked! Some of the music was lame, but the rest was good. There was no name on it, so I put a sign up at school. Nobody claimed it before the sign came down so I started using it. I bought headphones, a charger, and downloaded songs. Now I've found out that a senior lost her iPod about the time I found this one. I'd feel foolish giving it back since I've been using it all this time. I don't particularly want to give it back because I've spent money on it. Any advice? I love you,
Denali

The Seventh

The Seventh Commandment:
You shall not steal.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, or get it by dishonest dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of income.

You did so many things right when you found that iPod. You rescued it from damage in the snowbank. You attempted to find the owner. Then, only after it seemed the owner could not be found, you began to use it as your own. And now, instead of shrugging, you are struggling with giving back what you thought belonged to you. You've even asked for advice. That's worth my applause.

In my neighborhood when I was a kid the rule of thumb was *finders keepers, losers weepers*. I'm sorry to report that, once upon a time, I got a nice baseball glove using that motto. But Jesus has a different principle for us to use with lost items. His rule of thumb is something like *finders returners, losers regainers*. And his rule applies even when the rightful owner turns up months—or years—later.

It was a year after claiming that baseball glove that I had to give it back. One of my classmates saw me with it, identified it as his, and insisted I return it. There was a sock 'em, punch 'em fight. I bested the boy. But when I arrived at home all scuffed up, my father asked what happened. It wasn't long before he marched me over to the boy's house to hand over the glove—as well as my apology for the fight.

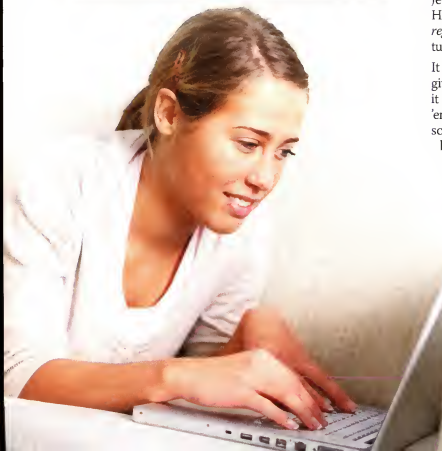
JESUS OUR SIN-THIEF

That's when Dad had a talk with me that I still remember. He gently explained why we Christians refuse to take whatever does not belong to us.

"Jesus has stolen from you, so you will want to obey when he commands, 'You shall not steal,'" he said.

"Jesus has stolen from me?" I asked.

"Yes. He's stolen your sins. We usually don't think about Jesus stealing anything because he is sinless, but in a way he did steal your sins. He took them without



h Commandment

James A. Aderman

your permission. None of us would ever part with our sins on our own. Sinners love their sins too much. But Jesus took your sins from you and claimed them as his own. He suffered the punishment his Father would have given you for your sins. And Jesus refuses ever to give those sins back."

My father continued, "You know how the Bible says, 'While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8). We didn't ask Jesus to take our sins; he just took them from us because he loves us that much. And while he was dying on the cross, his Father was paying to Jesus the wages our sins earned for us. Now, since Jesus took our sins, they can never come back to haunt and hurt us. There is nothing God will ever condemn in us.

"Since Jesus loved you so much that he stole your sins, you can be sure he will always provide exactly what you need, when you need it. And you can be sure that if you don't have something you think is important, it's because Jesus knows it's not important enough for you to have."

I've learned that keeping my heart focused on Jesus and his theft of my sins guards me from the many ways there are to break the Seventh Commandment. I have never strong-armed anyone into giving me money, but I dream about how \$100 million in lottery winnings would make my life better. I've never tricked anyone out of their retirement nest egg, but I have borrowed books and tools that never found their way back to the owners. I definitely waste the gifts God has given me. I tend to spend so much on myself that there's nothing left to give to special needs in world missions or cancer research. With Jesus in focus, I am able to better steer clear of those sins and to more readily repent when I don't.

GOD OUR PROVIDER

Of course, Jesus' love doesn't just call for us to refrain from taking what doesn't belong to us. His love urges us to help others keep what he's given them, even to assist them in gaining more. One of the reasons people tend not to help others get ahead is because it seems like resources are limited. If someone else has what they want, there is less of a chance they can have it too. We Christians see it differently. The God who has taken our sins has the power to give without limits. Our Savior can provide anything he knows we need at just the right time.

That leaves us content to get things only in the ways that please God. So we work and save. Every once in a while, though, someone might give us something on our wish

list. That's a nice thing about birthdays, isn't it? And, much less often, we might find something without being able to locate its owner. Jesus' commitment also frees us to use what he provides not only on ourselves but for our family; for those in need; for the support of our government; and, of course, for spreading the good news about Jesus.

Talk to that girl at your school. If the iPod you've been using is hers, return it. You can still rejoice that you had an iPod for a couple months. And you can know that Jesus, the thief, may provide you with another iPod—whenever that's good for you.

Thank you for handling this so well, Denali. Oh, the applause you hear in the background, it's from me.

I love you!

Grandpa

James Aderman is pastor at Fairview, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This is the eighth article in a ten-part series on the Ten Commandments.



Why me?

Sometimes God's plan is hard to see. But he always has a plan, even when it includes pain and loss. Mark Roloff

I will never forget that early January afternoon 30 years ago. Alone, in a hospital bed and far from home. I had just turned 21 and was in the Air Force. I had met Susan and was due to be married. I was on top of the world. But the doctors came in and said I had cancer. Worse yet, it had spread. I was told that I had about a 30 percent chance of survival. Why me? I was a good Christian, right? I went through Lutheran grade school and a Lutheran high school. I sang in the school and church choir. Why me?

I turned to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and prayed. I prayed long and hard that day. I looked back upon my life, and I saw all my sins exposed. I was ashamed, desolate, and empty. I might hide my sins from others while I was far away and no one was watching, but not from Jesus. But I also remembered the sacrifice, love, and forgiveness of Jesus for me. My prayer ended something like, "Lord, if my work is done and it be your will that I be called home, that's okay. If you have further work for me to do, that's okay too. I leave the decision in your hands, Lord. Please guide and direct my life. Not my will but your will be done. In Jesus' name. Amen."

Well, you know the rest of the story. I'm writing this 30 years later. My chemo treatments ended five months after Susan and I married. I was pronounced in remission. I went on to earn my business degree, join a Fortune 100 company in Wisconsin, and earn my MBA.

TROUBLES RETURN

After a couple years I was transferred from Wisconsin to Tennessee. We found a small WELS congregation

meeting in a member's home. I was part of the church council and knocked on doors preparing for our first service. Susan and I had a 15-acre ranch with four horses. It was Susan's greatest dream come true. We made some very close friends. Over time one of them eventually confessed his belief in our Savior Jesus Christ. I was successful at work. Life was good.

Soon after the opening of Living Word Lutheran Church, I was asked by the president of another division to come and help him in Wisconsin. We bought a house in Wisconsin and settled in. We soon made some friends but found that they were having problems. Over time, the Holy Spirit used our witness to bring some to know Jesus.

Unfortunately, about that time the corporate political winds shifted. My division was merged with another. I was stunned when I was told I would be let go. I had 15 years of outstanding performance and exceptional accomplishments. I went home and asked, "Why me?" I had worked so hard. I felt betrayed. I truly felt God meant for me to be here. Why were bad things happening to me? I prayed frequently and asked God to guide my life so I could make the right choices.

Many were in the same boat and were very negative, but now I strangely had a very positive attitude. When asked how I was doing, I would reply, "Fantastic! The good Lord has his plans for me, and all things work out well for those who love him."

I was able to get a job with a company in Pennsylvania, and we moved again. I had a much better salary and traveled

all over the world and met some fantastic people. I asked others to share their life stories. They were amazing. I also shared mine. I found myself witnessing for my Savior in China, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, Bangladesh, and throughout Europe. Later a woman I had met and talked to in Indonesia sent me an e-mail thanking me. She had left the Muslim faith and converted to Christianity. How could my little conversation have such an impact?

TROUBLES CONTINUE

Then the company was sold, and my position was eliminated. What was going on? I had worked so hard and had exceptional reviews. Why was this happening again? I then found a company in Texas, and we moved once again. We bought a lovely home and started attending Cross and Crown, a WELS church we loved. I was on the church council, and Susan was on the altar guild. This time I was sure that God had finally brought me home.

A year later the parent company declared bankruptcy. I cried. I had worked so hard and tried to do everything right. Why me, Lord? I could not understand. I joined a company in Nevada, but before I could even move Susan from Texas, things again went sour. Then there was another company in Dallas, but the same story.

Of course, I was beginning to have doubts. Three jobs lasted less than a year. I was 50 years old, and my resume was a mess. I was once the rising star, and now I wasn't sure if I could even

find a job. Eventually I joined a company in North Carolina to try one more time. We put the house in Texas up for sale and moved to North Carolina. But month after month went by, and we were stuck with a house payment in Texas and a rental house in North Carolina. Our savings were being exhausted. This was not the plan! Why, Lord? Why?

Then the answers came, and they came hard. My department was eliminated at the same time my health got worse. We still had the house in Texas, but things were as bad as they could get. My health could not handle the stress and long hours needed to keep a job. All I had worked so hard for was disappearing. My dreams were shattered.

GOD'S PLAN REVEALED

We moved back to our house in Texas and quickly realized just how much we had missed Cross and Crown. Now we thank our Lord for bringing us back to Texas. Our loving Savior lifted the scales from my eyes—I was looking at things all wrong. He had done exactly as I had so often asked. I saw that everywhere we went something needed to be done or someone needed help. We always seemed to leave when things were stable and our work was done. Susan and I now laugh and jokingly wish God would have sent some of these people to us so we wouldn't have had to move so much. Who knows; maybe he did that too. It all goes back to a lonely 21-year-old, far from home, lying in the hospital, whom our loving Lord blessed with cancer.

So why do bad things happen to good people? That answer is way above my pay grade. I can only personally attest that though the trials can be painful and distressing, they can drive you closer to Jesus, help build his churches, provide comfort to others in need, and offer unlimited opportunities to use those "bad" things to witness God's plan of salvation.

Mark Rolloff is a member at Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Texas.



Time to be on time?

Joel V. Petermann

Being chronically late is not loving one another as Jesus has loved us.

It happened to me the other day. I was going to an appointment, and I got into some bad traffic. It slowed me down. I was a few minutes late for my appointment. It happens. There is nothing much we can do about it. Circumstances beyond our control make us late to meetings, appointments—even Sunday services.

But I think there is a difference between being late on occasion and being late all the time. We may not always realize how being late is affecting others. That's where it's not just a bad habit but exhibits a bit of our selfish sinful nature. Please allow me to explain.

First of all, God's Word tells us that when we become Christians, the one for whom we are living changes. Paul declares, "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). He also instructs us, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4).

Let's say a person is always 10 to 15 minutes late for meetings. Is that looking to the interests of others? Doesn't the leader have to delay the start of the meeting? Or if he begins on time, isn't he interrupted when the tardy person comes in? Doesn't he often have to repeat for the benefit of the tardy person?

Or what about a person who is always coming late to a worship service? When a person comes in late, is he or she prepared in heart and mind to worship the Lord? What is she or he saying about the relative importance of the Lord compared to sleep or the things that just "had to get done" before that person left the house? Could better planning have avoided the tardiness? Does the late entrance disturb the worship of others?

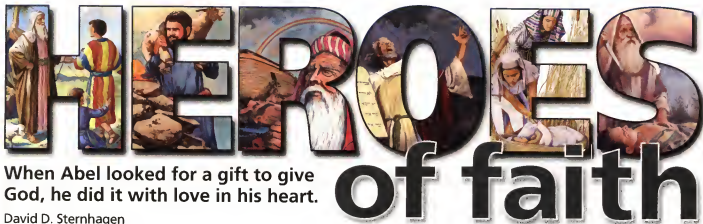
In some extreme cases, tardiness is actually like any addiction. It is very difficult for a person who is chronically tardy to break the pattern. Unfortunately it can lead others to begin to be tardy too. It almost becomes an epidemic.

Some say, "Just start on time, and that will solve it." I don't think it is that simple. I do think it can be solved, however. First it has to be recognized for what it is. Being chronically late is not loving one another as Jesus has loved us. I know that there are some cultures where being late is no big deal. But today in America, we have the expectation that we are on time. Being chronically late is not showing consideration of others' time.

The solution: repentance and forgiveness. Admitting my problem is the first step. The second step is knowing that this sin like all others was borne on the shoulders of him who came when the fullness of time had come; he did not delay. Only then in the forgiving love of Jesus can I make a change in my life out of love for others and my Savior. "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (1 Corinthians 10:24). That's what my Savior did. That's what I want to do. Being on time is one way I can show thanks to Jesus and love to others.

Now that I think of it, I better get this article in on time.

Contributing editor Joel Petermann is pastor at St. Paul, Amherst, New Hampshire.



HEROES

When Abel looked for a gift to give God, he did it with love in his heart.

David D. Sternhagen

"Here comes my favorite part of the worship service—the offering."

Well, I guess I've never heard anyone say that, but I know some people who feel that way. I think one of them was named Abel.

ABEL'S FAITH DEMONSTRATED

In what must be one of the most tragic stories in the Bible, the first child born here on earth kills the second. Cain and Abel were born into the sinful world that Adam and Eve had caused with their sin. We know that sin is a powerful force, but to murder your brother?

Moses explains what happened in Genesis 4:2-5: "Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor." Then we read that Cain killed Abel (v. 8).

Why was Abel's offering acceptable to God and Cain's was not? It sounds as if Abel went out of his way to choose the very best that he had, and Cain didn't. But God does not reject our offering if it isn't the very best we could give. Instead, the problem with Cain's offering was not what was on the altar, but what was in his heart—or better, what wasn't in his heart. The writer to the Hebrews explains that faith wasn't in Cain's heart.

Abel knew the promise of God to send a Savior to wash away his sins. Abel could see from the world around him that he had a God who loved him and cared for him. He knew God's promise to send someone to erase the sin and death caused by his parents. So when Abel looked for a gift to give God, he did it with love in his heart. How could he not give his best?

When the collection plate comes around, I get to talk to God not only with my voice but also with my heart.

OUR GIFTS OF FAITH

It's not easy to make an offering to God. I'm not sure it is supposed to be. The economy has been struggling lately. Sometimes the bills seem to be greater than the income. Just think of what you could buy with the money you give to God. God doesn't need it. He didn't need Cain's or Abel's offering either. That is what it looks like when you focus on the offering.

It works better to focus on who receives the offering. Here is God, who for some unknown reason—it's grace—loved me. Here is God, who in spite of all my failures, sins, and

selfishness, wrapped his arms around me and made me his own. Here is God, who says to me, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). This is the God for whom I want to pick out a gift. And I want my gift to say something. I want it to say "Thank you," but more. I want it to say, "I believe you."

With that focus, I join Abel in choosing the very best that I have. When the collection plate comes around, I get to talk to God not only with

my voice but also with my heart. I get to stand with Abel whose offering made him a hero of faith.

"Faith is being sure of what we hope for" (Hebrews 11:1).

Contributing editor David Sternhagen is pastor at Crown of Life, New Orleans, Louisiana.

This is the second article in a 12-part series on Old Testament heroes of faith.



John O'Brien

A big God

Ancient builders carved two large footprints on the threshold of the Ain Dara Temple in northern Syria. There's another footprint—a right foot—inside the first chamber of the temple. Then 30 feet farther inside is another footprint—a left foot.

What I found so interesting is the apparent theology that lies behind the footprints. The people needed to worship a god that was larger than they were—more intelligent, more powerful—and they seemed to need confirmation that the god was near, coming to them at the temple. The 30-foot stride indicates a god 65 feet tall. So they worshipped such a god and waited for his help.

But such a god is still quite small. It seems that they might have imagined a god that wasn't too big to hold firmly in their human thoughts. Perhaps they also did not want a god that was so big that, at least together, they could not control him—sort of like the way the Lilliputians thought they could tie down Gulliver. Even their worship and sacrifices—if they offered them—were intended to bend this god to their will or to bribe him so he would grant good crops and prosperity.

Our human minds can imagine such a god—with a larger than human footprint but not too big that we can't grasp him with our human brains; control him; or at least influence him with our prayers, offerings, or good behavior. Humans have always made such gods. That's the limit of our ability to think and conceive of some deity.

Do we find such concepts of god around us today? I don't think we have to look too far. Some of those ideas might even find a home in the mental temples we build. We want a god we can understand—one who neatly fits into our thinking. We re-

ject him if he does or says things we don't understand or can't grasp.

All that simply brings God down to our level—makes his footprint large but not too large. On one level, we can grasp his greatness as we look around at his footprints here on earth—the sunrise, the beauty of the mountains, the seas, the wonderful animals that populate our world, or a host of other things. Paul even says as much, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Romans 1:20).

But that's only part of the reality. At the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, Solomon said that God could not be contained by the temple or even the heavens (2 Chronicles 6:18). Isaiah also reminds us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and that his ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8,9). God is God. We don't stand in judgment of God. We don't tell God what to do or tell him who he is.

Instead, God has told us what we need to know about him. He carefully revealed it through the ages and finally gave us the last chapter in Jesus. Read the opening verses of Hebrews. In Jesus, God reveals his love for his wayward, selfish, vain, and small creatures. He restrained the power and glory that would consume us and the universe in order to become human. We don't sacrifice to him in the hope of gaining some divine favor. He sacrifices himself for us so we might come to him. He declares us righteous because of Jesus. This is God—larger, deeper, higher, wider, and longer than we could ever imagine.

Theologies without Jesus are just big footprints.

God is God. . . .
We don't tell God
what to do or tell
him who he is.
Instead, God has
told us what we
need to know
about him.



Donald W. Patterson

Portraits of a mature Christian

A strong desire and ability to practice spiritual discernment

A teen raises her hand in Bible class and asks, "How far can we go on a date?" An 11-year-old boy unwillingly hands over his iPod to his mother and exclaims, "Mom, that song is not that bad. It didn't have any curse words in it!" As she listens to the song for herself, she finds that it encourages drunkenness. A college student starts attending a nondenominational church. When her dad asks her about what they teach there, she says, "Dad, they believe in Jesus just like we do."

What do all of these people have in common? They all exhibit a lack of discernment regarding what they take into their minds and hearts. When God created us in his own image, he always intended that we would think his thoughts. He never wanted us exposed to evil ideas much less stack them like cordwood in our minds. He wanted us to understand that his thoughts are truth and bring many blessings.

There is a saying in the computer world that applies to our minds: "Garbage in, garbage out." If you put garbage into the memory of a computer, it won't drain out later when you turn the computer off. It stays piled there until it is erased. It often comes out later to affect other computers connected to it on the Internet. We call them computer viruses. Just like computer viruses, worldly ideas infect people all over the world every day. God wants us to filter out what opposes his truth and would harm our faith. He wants us to be careful so we are not drawn away from his grace.

Spiritually mature people understand this. They put safeguards in place to guard their minds and lives from evil influences.

The writer to the Hebrews wanted his readers to start practicing discernment regarding all the worldly and wild religious ideas they were hearing. Let's study what he told them and reclaim for ourselves an aptitude for discernment. Read Hebrews 5:11-14 and answer the following questions.

Hebrews 5:11-14

¹¹We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. ¹²In fact, though by

this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. After you read the entire passage, what clearly is God's goal for every Christian?
2. What does it mean to be "acquainted with the teaching about righteousness"?
3. What does the writer say in verse 14 that the mature person does?
4. How do we use the Scriptures to help us discern good from evil?

TREASURES TO SHARE

1. Describe what happens to a person who does not discern right from wrong when taking in different media.
2. How does discernment help us to live happier lives?
3. How does truth demand discernment?
4. What are the reasons we might become lax in discernment?

RELATED SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

1 Timothy 4:15,16
Philippians 4:8
Proverbs

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This is the fifth article in a 12-part series on Christian maturity. Find this study and answers online after March 5 at www.wels.net/forwardinchrist.



LENT

is about cleaning

Jesus washes away and wipes away every last sin—
big and small, known and unknown.

Daniel R. Voigt

Maybe it sounds a bit strange, but it is true. The season of Lent brings to my mind a memory from my childhood.

WE CLEANED THE CHURCH

My mom was one of the librarians at my grade school and one of the janitors at the church where my family attended. Library day was Tuesday, and cleaning day was Friday. That was the normal schedule.

Except during Lent. The additional Wednesday evening services meant an extra cleaning of church. So Mom combined the two roles and carried out both responsibilities on Tuesday. Before she checked out books during the day, she vacuumed up cheerios in the morning.

But she was not alone in her work. She woke up my brothers, my sister, and me for the task. At the crack of dawn, the unpaid volunteers got a chauffeured ride in the station wagon instead of the school bus. That happened every Tuesday for six weeks. There was a job to be done—hymnals to straighten up and pews to wipe down.

I will be honest. I questioned how dirty and dusty could the church actually be after only a few days? And I complained, “Was the added cleaning extremely critical and crucial?”

JESUS CLEANS OUR SOULS

I do not think that my mom was trying to teach me an object lesson or a life lesson. She simply wanted everything to look nice for worship the next night. But perhaps that was a good reminder of what Lent is all about—cleaning.

Do we need Lent again this year? Yes. It is a unique opportunity for us to admit and acknowledge our sin. The evil that we think makes our hearts filthy. The wrong that we do makes our lives foul. Every spot has to be scoured, and every stain has to be scrubbed. But we can't clean up the spots. It doesn't matter what we try or how hard we try. Someone else must do it for us.

That is what Jesus did. The One whose birth we celebrate on Christmas Day is the One whose death we see on Good Friday. He died, not for his own sins. He had none. He died for our sins and in our place. He laid down his life to give us pardon and grant us peace. His pure blood cleanses us. No sin clings to us. His perfect blood covers us. No sin remains on us—including the one you still struggle with. He washes away and wipes away every last one—big and small, known and unknown.

But our Savior did not stay dead. He rose three days later. His sacrifice was

sufficient. It was a onetime payment, and it is good for all times and for all people. No other payment is required. Easter Sunday shows us that.

Because Jesus carried God's perfect plan to completion, he returned to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. There he intercedes for us—pleading for us and purifying us from all sin. He holds us up, forgiving us when we fall into sin. He helps us out, strengthening us when we face temptation.

My mom no longer mops and sweeps at church. Someone else does that now. I contend that it is because all of her little assistants grew up and moved out. But I continue to think about those early mornings around this time of the year. Perhaps that is not all bad. I suppose that Lent really has always been about cleaning. Not of the church, but of the soul. Yours and mine. Happy Lent.

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